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Africa given to Christ.

A Sermon preached before
the Vermont Colonization
Society, October 20, 1830,

By Reuben Smith.





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AFRICA

GIVEN TO CHRIST:

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

VERMONT COLONIZATION SOCIETY,

AT

MONTPELIER, OCT. 20, 1830.

BY REUBEN SMITH,

Pastor of the Calvinistic Congregational Church, Burlington, Vt.

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SERMON.

PSALM, LXVIII. 31.

Princes shall come out of Egypt ; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.

PROPHECY has been said to be either *historical* or *discursive*. The first relates to predictions, which have a regular historical connection, like those of Daniel and the author of the Apocalypse—the other, is where the prophet does not follow a chronological order, but breaks out in rhapsodies, as the spirit of God upon him, or the kindred glories of his theme more immediately suggest.

If this distinction be a just one, it is evident that the prophecy chosen for our text, is of the latter description. The Psalmist is expatiating in one of his most elevated strains, on the character of Jehovah and his mighty works on the behalf of Messiah's kingdom—and he *throws himself out*, to use the expression of another, upon some of the most remarkable glories of that kingdom in the last days. Far down the vista of time, a captivating object rises upon his vision : the connecting links in the chain of events are of no consequence, and time, space and circumstances are apparently forgotten, while he exclaims—"Princes shall come out of Egypt :—Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God!"

Where then is that *Ethiopia*, the vision of which so captivated the prophet? and what is the amount of the prediction on its behalf, which is here contained?

That tract of country on the west of the Red Sea, to which the name of *Ethiopia*, and more generally, of *Abysinia*, is now given, cannot, we think, be the whole region intended by the prediction. It seems of too little extent and importance : and we are sure, moreover, that this name was given to more than one country, according to the language of inspiration.

For determining what country or people are intended by the prediction of our text, therefore, I remark in the first place, that the name of *Ethiopian* literally signifies *burnt-countenance*, and was given by the Greeks to many people on account of their sun-burnt complexion.* But no term of similar import is found in the Hebrew Scriptures, and there the people whom the Greek interpreters have called *Aἰθιοπες*—*Ethiops*, are uniformly styled *Cushites*, or the children of *Cush*.† We are to seek for the true origin of the Ethiopians then, in *Cush* the son of *Ham*.‡ This race first settled between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, in what the scriptures call the land of *Shinar*. Here *Nimrod* founded the first empire, and hence, went out *Asher*, also, who built *Nineveh*, and finally gave name to *Assyria*. It is with reference to this first location of the *Cushites*, or *Ethiopians*, probably, *Moses* has told us, that one of the rivers of *Paradise*, “compassed all the land of *Ethiopia*.”

They next seem to have wandered farther southward and to have settled that part of *Arabia*, which lies about the *Persian gulf*: and hence this region was also called *Ethiopia*, as when it is said of *Moses* in *Midian* that he married an *Ethiopian* woman. But in process of time—according to the testimony of *Josephus* and *Eusebius*—they crossed the *Red Sea*—and established themselves in that part of *Africa*—south of *Egypt* and east of *Lybia*—which is now called *Abysinia*, or *Ethiopia proper*.|| Here they long vexed the more northern *Africans*, and are supposed by many to have been those *Shepherd kings*, who once dethroned the *Egyptian monarchs*.§ Here the gospel found a portion of them in the fourth century—and here a remnant of them are to be found—under a very corrupt form of Christianity, at the present day.

But there is reason for pursuing the migration of the *Ethiopians* much farther than the bounds of *Abysinia*. The north-

* See Edinburgh Encyclopedia. Art. *Abysinia*.

† See *Griffin's Plea for Africa*; from which several helps are acknowledged in the following argument.

‡ See *Genesis* x. 6.

|| See *Brown's Dict. Bib. Art. Cush*.

§ See *Josephus' Antiq. Jews*, Lib. I. ch. vi.

ern extremity of Africa was settled by other sons of Ham*—but the great deserts of *Lybia* and *Sahara* would for ages prevent their further migration southward—and it remained for the Ethiopians—still wandering and losing their tribes in the vast and fertile regions of the south—finally to give inhabitants to *all the rest of Africa*. It is certain, accordingly, that in process of time, the whole continent took the name of Ethiopia.†

To this locality accordingly, agree various scriptural allusions. Thus Isaiah exclaims—“Wo to the land, shadowing with wings: which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia”‡—and again, God says by the mouth of Zephaniah—“From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my supplicants—even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering.”||—If the Nile and its branches are meant, by these rivers of Ethiopia—it settles the location, to have been south or west of them, in relation to Judea. Again, the prophet’s question—“can the Ethiopian change his skin?”§—clearly refers to a people colored like the Africans—and finally our text has so coupled this country and Egypt, together, as could not well have been intended of any thing less than all Africa, when speaking of Messiah’s latter-day kingdom. “Princes shall come out of Egypt: Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” We arrive at the conclusion, then, that, by the Ethiopia of our text, is to be understood all the southern continent of Africa: the people, the interesting people, upon which the Holy Ghost deigned to fix the attention of the entrance prophet—in the midst of many other commanding objects—and to assure him that they should be set as another star in Messiah’s crown in the latter-day—this people were Africans, the injured Africans, for whose benefit we are attempting to excite the attention of our fellow men this evening.

That we may do this the more successfully and give something like a due elevation to this commanding theme, we proceed to urge several particular considerations.

* See Gen. x. 6, and 13.

† See Rees’ Encyc. Art. *Ethiopia*.

‡ Isaiah xviii. 1.

|| Zeph. iii. 10.

§ Jer. xiii. 23.

1. And the first is, *the character of that country and people for whom these attentions are sought.* Little as is yet known of it, we are perhaps warranted in saying, that there is no country on earth, which more commends itself to the attention of the philanthropist, than the continent of Africa. It is a country of great extent—reaching not less than four thousand miles into each point of the compass, and rich in the capacity of almost every production of the globe. But although thus vast and inviting, it is a continent of which little has yet been intimately known by the civilized world—a mere belt of surrounding light, comparing with the whole, like the rind to the body of an orange. The remainder however, is not, like some of our western solitudes, “dark and wasteful,” but filled for the most part, by a dense and varied population. Its inhabitants are variously estimated, at, from 150 to 200 millions—speaking, it is said, 200 different languages and dialects. These numerous nations are, with few exceptions, either Idolators or Mussulmen, and greatly prejudiced, through the influence of the slave trade and other causes, against all direct intercourse with the rest of mankind.*

Here, then, is an object for philanthropic enterprize, in which the materials are all native, and afforded on the largest scale: To improve the mental capacities of these many millions, and raise them to the condition of civilized and christian men—to mould their governments and direct their commerce—to redress, in this way, their wrongs, and remove their prejudices—to open their intercourse with other nations, and to introduce them to all the advantages and comforts of social existence—to do all this, and for such a continent as Africa, would indeed be worthy the ambition of a great and intelligent nation like our own: an enterprize worthy of our ambition, friends and christian brethren, and one, which to labor in is an elevating privilege, however remote our success.

And this is the proper place to say something of the *African capacity* for these high improvements—and the rather, on account of an *objection* to our enterprize, which has

* See Morse's Gazetteer, art. *Africa*—and the late reports from the Colony of *Liberia*.

sometimes arisen from this quarter. By those, who are interested, or cruel enough to desire perhaps, that it were so, the intellectual capacity of the negro race, has long been called in question, and his most degraded state has been appealed to, and his very bones subjected to measurement, to establish the unfeeling assumption. A French writer speaks of "the negroes as incapable of advancing a single step towards civilization, and destined to remain 20,000 centuries hence, what they have been 20,000 centuries already, the disgrace and misfortune of the human race."*

To these weighty charges you will permit me to reply therefore, and at some length. And the first suggestion is, *how little we really know of the true character of the African.* For how and in what circumstances have we seen him? We have seen him enslaved, broken-hearted, crushed;—or, at best, shut out from all aids and encouragement to mental elevation—by the influence of slavery, and the inconquerable barrier of his relative situation.

To know the negro as he is, we must look at him as he appears in the island of St. Domingo. There he will be seen the self-conscious freeman, the enterprising merchant, or industrious planter—the able diplomatist and the accomplished man of letters. Some who have made this comparison, have told us of their astonishment, at the amount of difference, it exhibited. They assure us that the distance is not more manifest between the Parisian Frenchman and the *voyageur* of the northern fur trade—than between the African enslaved or among white men, and a freeman on a congenial soil.

But we appeal further, *to facts*: and facts will show that the negro mind has exhibited high attainments, and those of almost every department.

Terrence, the accomplished writer of Latin comedy, was an African slave, and so was *Lockman*, surnamed in Arabia *the wise*, and whose opinions are referred to for authority by Mahomet himself. In more modern times, we have equally

* Barre St. Venant, as quoted by Bishop Gregoire, p. 152.

distinguished examples. *Kisla Aga*, chief of the black eunuchs in the court of the Grand Seignor, is mentioned in Turkish history, as “a man of great wisdom and profound knowledge.” *Hige-mondo*, another African, was a distinguished painter; *Henry Diaz*, a military commander of Brazil—*Francis Williams*, teacher of mathematics in Jamaica—*Antony William Amo*, who took the degree of Doctor in Philosophy in the University of Wurtemberg, were of the same race, and so were *Dessalines* and *Louverture* the conquerors of St. Domingo, with *Gustavus Vasa*, the Christian author, and our own *Phillis Wheatley*, whose poems have already passed several editions, both in Europe and the United States.*

But the African’s skull has been measured!—and it has been found narrow, and receding!—Well, let it be measured. Phrenology is not yet sufficiently established as a science, to be extensively relied on; but it has its uses perhaps, and one has been, as many think, to throw light on the origin of nations. Dr. Madden has come to the conclusion, from the measurement of a great number of heads, in the mummy pits of upper Egypt, that the ancient inhabitants of that country were *Nubians*:† of course so far as phrenology is concerned, the Egyptians are very nearly allied to the present Ethiopians. How will our skeptical antiquarians relish this? Suppose it should appear in the end, that Thebes—the cradle of science and the arts,—which gave them to Greece, and to us—was originally peopled by a negro race!

But let us confine ourselves to what is better known. We have proved that, originally, the Africans were *Cushites*:—that the Cushites of Mesopotamia were renowned in wisdom, is the testimony of all history. Thence came *Nimrod* a mighty one of the south:—thence came *Asher*, the founder of the Assyrian Empire, and there arose, too, the Astronomers of Babylon, the first who studied the sublime science of the heavens. This does not look like native incapacity in the Ethiopian

* The above list has been drawn principally from the Appendix to the “Plea for Africa,” where the original authorities may be seen.

† See Madden’s Travels, vol. ii. p. 61.

race : these facts are not the index to a history of Baboons. No ; the African is a *man and a brother* : long degraded, abused and trodden down as he has been ; he is still *a man*, a noble and immortal being, heaven-descended and aspiring as ourselves. We do not know him : we abuse both him and his Maker, if we rest in any other view.

If this be admitted then, if the African is a man, and immortal, and is contemplated as such *in the benevolent regards of his Maker*, it disposes of the objection to which we have been attending. But this will still further appear from our second general remark, to which I now invite you.

2. *The renovation of the African race, in the latter days, is a distinct subject of prophecy.* This is not only implied in the general representation “that all the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord,” but it is more specifically taught in other passages, and particularly in those, which relate to the glories of Messiah’s kingdom.

Thus it was predicted of Solomon’s glory in the 72d Psalm, “the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.” Sheba and Seba were countries taking their names from the son and grandson of Cush :* and these are to bring their glory into Messiah’s kingdom in the latter day. Solomon is universally admitted to have been a type of the Messiah, and although the Queen of the south commenced a literal fulfilling of this prophecy in her visit to that monarch, it would be contrary to the scope of the whole Psalm, to confine it to such an interpretation.

Again it is said, in a passage already quoted, “from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my supplicants, the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring my offering.” This prediction is supposed by Dr. Scott to refer directly to the Africans, and by Poole, to the return of the Jews ; but even on the latter supposition, it seems to secure our position, since the dispersed Jews could hardly be gathered and bring their offering from this region, except in connection with the renovation of other nations. But our text is still more explicit. Here

* See Gen. x. 7.

Egypt and Ethiopia are represented as *stretching out their hands unto God*. Stretching out the hands unto God, is obviously a metaphor for expressing a *religious, or worshiping people*: and this is affirmed as pertaining to *all Africa* in the latter day.

The Psalmist is looking to this. The prediction was not accomplished by the introduction of Christianity into Abyssinia in the fourth century: no! the prophet's eye is fixed on a far more extensive prospect. Africa, the negro race, shall yet stretch out their sable hands to God!

And here is the place to consider *another objection* which has often been urged on this subject. We have been told that the Africans are under the curse of Ham—that their color is an indication of this, and that to seek their renovation is to attempt recovering them from a providential malediction.

It is not necessary to reply to the latter part of this assumption. The varieties of human complexion are believed to be principally owing to climate, and of the correctness of this opinion, the Jews alone are a sufficient proof, who are known to be of all colors, according to the country in which they are found. But we deny the other assumption. The Ethiopian branch of Ham's family never came under the curse; it was confined to Canaan,* and was fulfilled when the descendants of Shem, brought under and destroyed that devoted race, in the time of Joshua.

But should it be admitted that this malediction had fallen on other branches of the family, is it any where said that it shall be *unending*? Are there no limits of time, beyond which avarice and cruelty, under the hypocritical pretence of fulfilling the purposes of providence, shall not continue to wreak this judgment on a devoted race? Our text answers this question. Prophecy sees Africa redeemed: prophecy smites off the chains from their weary wrists, and lifts them up in praise and prayer to God.

3. *Thirdly*, our attention is strongly called to this people, by the character of the times, in which we live. No one,

* See Gen. ix. 25, 26.

who seriously and intelligently studies passing events, can fail to be convinced, we apprehend, that we are living at an important era of the world's history. That era, in the opinion of many, commenced a few years previous to the beginning of the present century. Then—besides that mighty *revolution*, which shook all Europe, and which, according to some modern commentators on prophecy, slew the witnesses and ended the 1260 years of Papal persecution—just then, commenced that whole series of remarkable religious movements, which has already effected, under Providence, to put a new aspect on the face of christian society. The first of all the English Missionary Societies, was organized in 1792, the British and Foreign Bible society followed in '95 and the Sabbath School System had been brought into operation but a few years before. About the same time also, commenced the remarkable series of modern out-pourings of the Holy Spirit :—and now what have we already witnessed as the results of these united movements?

They have resulted in giving the means of education to more than half a million of children, for whom no other adequate aids to mental improvement existed :—they have translated the scriptures into more than fifty new languages and dialects, and distributed them, freely as water, to almost every nation under heaven: They have preached the everlasting gospel to many millions of men, living before, in utter ignorance of its existence, and they have gathered, through grace, we have no doubt, a glorious company of the Redeemer's children, many of whom have already gone to heaven.

Nor is this all, which has been remarkable in our times. *The Jews* have been more cared for, within the last thirty years, than during all the anterior period since their dispersion. Education and other means of knowledge have been far more generally diffused, while science and mechanical invention have been more assiduously applied to useful improvements, and have effected already an almost entire change in the facilities of intercourse and commerce.

Nor must we omit here a notice of those *political changes* which have marked, and are still marking, the same period.

The principles of civil and religious liberty, though obstructed for a season by a mighty reaction in some parts of Europe, have been extending themselves in secret, and the convulsive struggles of Naples, and Spain and Piedmont, have been but the natural breaking out of these suppressed emotions. In France they have at length been successful, and the world has been surprised with a Revolution, not less distinguished by its moderation, than the reasonableness of its principles, and the extent and propitiousness of its influence.

The Mahomedan power, in the mean time has experienced an extensive diminution of its resources, and that in several ways. The Sultan has been, for the first time, conquered and humbled by the Russians : The province of Egypt has revolted under *Ali Pacha* : Greece, another dependency, has obtained her independence—and now the conquest of Algiers has broken the charm of Islamism, in another strong hold, and opened all northern Africa to the influence of civilization.

I know not how these things may present themselves to others ; but to me, I confess, they appear immensely interesting. I am no visionary observer of the signs of the times ; but these events have come upon us in such a remarkable and rapid succession : they have so *seemed* to correspond with prophecy, and have in point of fact already wrought so many favourable changes in the state of human society, as to justify the hope, at least, that the world is approaching its final and most glorious state. We do emphatically live in *the last days*, and this is another reason for calling our attention to the destinies of the African race. They are given to Christ, as you have heard ; and his latter-day glory cannot be full, until their gathering is effected.

And here let me remind you of another remarkable fact : *that precisely at the commencement of the era, which has been mentioned, began also, the first decided movements in Providence, towards the renovation of the Africans.* The Revo-

lution in St. Domingo commenced in 1791—and the final establishment of the English Colony at *Sierra Leone* was effected in 1792.

It is remarkable, moreover, that within the same period, the most unwearyed exertions have been made, for the abolition of the slave trade, and that every civilized nation, except two, have now agreed to consider it as unlawful.

Finally, it has been within the same period that *the system of Colonization for people of Color*, has been devised; and it is in reference to this view,—the final renovation of Africa—that this interesting movement, has, as appears to me, its greatest importance. This Society was formed in the year 1816 at the city of Washington, and by some of the first of our great and good men from every portion of the United States. They purposed it primarily as a system of relief for two millions of fellow men in our own country—a population dangerous to ourselves and necessarily degraded here: but their ultimate object was even greater than this, and they extended their hopes to no less a consummation than the civilization and christianity of a whole continent.

And thus far this noble enterprise has decidedly prospered. Experiencing as yet no patronage but that of charity and voluntary association, it has effected the establishment of a colony of more than 1700 blacks on the western shore of Africa, who have already attained to all the advantages of a free and civilized community.

It would seem indeed that our general government must ultimately see the propriety of assuming this great enterprise; but while they hesitate to do this, it is a satisfaction to know, that the Colonization Society is sustained and yearly advancing in the confidence of the community. It has now its auxiliaries in nearly every state of the union, and it is with no small satisfaction, we are enabled to remark, that our own state was among the first to render this example. Yes; our northern and disinterested Vermont, whose mountain airs the breath of a slave never tainted, has been among the first to

yield her patronage to the Colonization Society, and our sons and brothers, educated in our own halls of science, have sacrificed their lives in the generous cause.*

The renovation of Africa is begun therefore, and begun in connexion with a remarkable series of providential events. And it is this view of its relations—I repeat it—that gives principal importance to the Society, whose auxiliary I address this evening. The Colony is favorably located on the western coast of this continent: it already has the confidence, and possesses the commerce of numerous tribes of the natives. Christian settlements have for some years been established at the southern extremity. The spirit of missions is again visiting the east:†—recent conquests, as we have seen, have opened the north, and thus surrounded with a belt of light, it does seem rational to hope, that the dark and unknown interior of this vast continent, is soon to be penetrated through the influence of these establishments.

Here, then, we come to ask your favorable regards, this evening, for a Society commanding itself by so many, and such interesting claims, as these. We ask it, you perceive for no ordinary object, and at no ordinary era in the history of the world. In aiding the Colonization Society, you are aiding a people long among the most renowned in history; a people long forgotten and debased and trodden down, however; but a people destined, according to prophecy, to be raised and blessed again, and whose renovation, it would seem, is already begun.

I ask my fellow mortals then, how much they are willing to give to promote an enterprize like this? I ask the statesman, who hates oppression, and rejoices in the extension of civil and religious liberty, how much he is willing to give towards rendering another nation free and independent? I ask the man of letters, who exults in the increase of the means of mental improvement, what he is willing to give,

* *Ashman, Andrus, and Holton.*

† The English Missions, now established in *Abysinia*.

that such as we enjoy, may be universally diffused?—and I ask, above all, the Christian—the Christian, who glories in nothing so much as the honor of his Master—I ask what he will give to add another gem—to set “*the topaz of Ethiopia*,” in the crown of the Redeemer?

These motives perhaps would be sufficient—and yet, that we may leave no appeal untried on such a subject as this, I will ask you to look again and more directly at the object, which is before you. The Holy Ghost did not refuse to look down on the latter-day history of Africa, and why, Christian friends, should we? Yonder is a continent teeming with uncounted millions of inhabitants, and now stretching out its hands, for the first time, in prayer and praise to God. Already its idols are abolished: already its laws and customs are changed, and the energies of its children are turned to more rational pursuits. The majestic Nile, and Congo, and Niger, bear the rich burdens of commerce: their banks are glittering with cities, or waving with the yellow harvests. On the mountain-side the shepherd unfolds his flock: in the meadow, the cheerful laborer plies his plough, or sings at night in his love-blessed habitation. The temples of science and religion rise: knowledge is diffused—the sabbaths of the Lord are kept: peace, joy and gratitude, beam in every face, and declare that the negro-race is blessed: **THE YEAR OF JUBILEE IS COME!**

The vision is before us, and it is sure. Yes; it will come; but the consummation is not yet: and while it tarries, avarice and cruelty are still pouring unmitigated woes upon this devoted race.

And now a change comes over me, and another and far different vision is seen. I behold a village trampled by contending foes, and wrapped in flames. The strife has closed, and the dark jobbers, in human flesh, who have been successful, are dragging away their devoted victims to their doom. Look, look on that manacled form, who now bleeds, and droops, and shudders, amidst these unimaginable woes. No wonder that he droops and shudders: nor is it strange, if amidst the sick-

enings of his soul for a doom like this, he seek the only relief, which his wild faith suggests to him, in suicide and despair.

"Alas he steals him from his loathsome shed,
"What time moist midnight blows its venom'd breath,
"And musing how he long has toil'd and bled—
"Drinks the dire balsam of consoling death.

"Haste, haste ye winds: on swifter pinions fly;
"Ere from this world of misery he go—
"Tell him his wrongs bedew a nation's eye:
"Tell him COLUMBIA blushes for his woe.

"Say, that in future, Negroes shall be blest:—
"Blessed even as men—and men's just rights enjoy;
"Be neither sold, nor famish'd, nor oppress'd:—
"No stripes shall wither, and no griefs destroy.

"Say that *fair freedom* bends her holy flight,
"To raise the offspring, and to cheer the sire:—
"So shall he, wandering, prove, at last, delight,
"And in a throb of ecstasy expire."

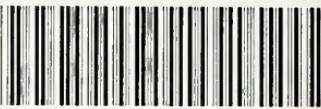
Oh give, with this double vision before you, friends and hearers! Give as you would wish others to give, were yours the fate of the Africans! give thus, and no stinted recompence will rejoice our labors this evening.—AMEN!

NOTE.

SUGGESTION.—It appears from the late reports of the A. C. Society, that about \$20 is considered sufficient for transporting an emigrant from this country to Liberia. *Twenty dollars weighed against a life of competency and independence!* Will not some patriot—some friend to the negro race, be induced to raise this sum for so great and truly benevolent an object?

It is suggested also, that much good might result from reading and distributing the publications on this subject, to the free people of color among ourselves.

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